DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 479 UD 031 717

TITLE	Building an Urban Schools Marshall Plan.
INSTITUTION	Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	[97]
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Accountability; Community Involvement; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Federal Aid; *Financial Support; Low Income Groups; Public Schools; School Restructuring; Standards; *State Aid; State Programs; Urban Education; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

In 1997, America needs to launch a new Marshall Plan, equivalent to the original Marshall Plan that was established to help fund Europe's recovery from World War II. The new Marshall Plan must be directed at America's own urban public school systems. The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) is announcing a five-part framework for an Urban School Marshall Plan. The five components are: (1) unified commitment for improving urban schools; (2) adequate state funding of urban schools; (3) extensive Federal aid for urban schools; (4) support for President Clinton's infrastructure proposal; and (5) mobilization of the nation and urban communities in support of the schools. The goal in developing this plan is to reverse years of financial and political neglect of urban school systems. Urban school leaders in the CGCS plan to redirect the energies of urban public schools so that each school educates each child to the highest academic standard. They will work to set high standards for all children and to provide well-trained teachers and staff, along with the books, materials, and technology schools need. Urban educators will work to strengthen system leadership and management, design assessments for greater accountability, and use resources effectively and equitably through efficient program delivery. As they build public support for the education of urban children, they will work to link schools with community resources. CGCS members commit to promoting all of the components of the initiative and they call on commitment from national and state leaders. (SLD)

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Building an Urban Schools Marshall Plan.

-The Council of the Great City Schools

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Building an Urban Schools Marshall Plan

In 1947, after Europe was thrown into chaos by the ending of World War II, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that the U.S. help fund Europe's recovery. Congress allocated $13 billion to this Marshall Plan for rebuilding Europe. The result was increased cooperation between the U.S. and western Europe, a tremendous growth in trade, an expansion of U.S. influence, and strengthening democracy in Europe.

In 1997, America needs to launch a new Marshall Plan. This time it is for our own urban public school systems. And the reasons for doing one now are the same as then: it is morally right, politically necessary, and in our democratic self-interests. The success of America's economy and the vibrancy of its democracy are intertwined with the success of city schools graduating the future leaders of our nation.

If the government of the United States could devote billions of dollars to rebuild countries overseas, it certainly has the power to devote funds to rebuild schools here at home. If the people of the United States could find the moral strength and political will to overcome our enemies abroad, we certainly have the power to use this strength and will to overcome the problems faced by our urban public schools.

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) is announcing a five-part framework for an Urban School Marshall Plan. It contains a short-run blueprint but a long-range demand for equity and fairness in America's support of urban schools. The five components are:

1. Our unified commitment for improving urban schools;
2. Adequate state financing of urban schools;
3. Extensive new federal aid for urban schools;
4. Support for President Clinton's infrastructure proposal and more; and
5. Mobilization of the nation and urban communities in support of our schools.

Our goal in developing this plan is to reverse years of financial and political neglect of our school systems. Our aim is to reduce disparities in funding; sustain urban education with aid adequate to attain "world class standards"; mobilize public support on behalf of urban children; provide facilities ample for their needs, and leadership strong enough to guide their destinies.

This effort will expand on what urban public schools know is successful with the nation's most diverse student enrollment. It comes as some of our nation's urban school systems are enacting groundbreaking educational reforms.

1.) The first component reflects a new consensus among urban educators about the strategies we know work and that we are determined to pursue. They are built around a single urban school mission to:

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"Educate the nation's most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to the global community and our democracy."

To fulfill this mission we will redirect the total energies of urban public schools so that each school educates each child to the highest academic standard. We will continue to lead and govern our schools effectively and in ways that inspire public confidence. We will strengthen our efforts to engage and build an involved and supportive urban community that can work with schools to raise the achievement of urban children.

We, urban schools leaders, commit to the long term implementation of the following strategies:

- Set high academic and performance standards for all children with appropriate benchmarks at selected grades;
- Provide well-trained teachers and staff who understand a variety of teaching techniques so that students of all learning styles can reach high standards;
- Provide all schools with the books, materials, and technology that our resources can buy to ensure student success and organize schools into safe, drug-free, and well-disciplined learning communities with smaller classes which permit more individualized attention;
- Strengthen system leadership and management, and enhance school decision making to ensure greater responsiveness and accountability to the community;
- Design assessments for greater accountability tied to standards and results for schools and staff;
- Use resources effectively and equitably through efficient program delivery, cost-effectiveness, and pursuit of adequate governmental funding;
- Build public support for the education of urban children with better reporting about what the schools are doing and more aggressive mobilization of the community to understand, shape, support, and participate in the education of children; and
- Link schools with community resources and coordinate necessary social services so that each student has an adult mentor, health care, the opportunity for community service, and a chance to participate in activities to resolve conflicts.

Accomplishing these goals and strategies will take more than just announcing them. Superintendents and school board members will be working together in ways similar to the Governors to reach a greater consensus on how to achieve each of these goals.

Urban schools also need money. They receive between $400 and $500 less per child than schools in their surrounding suburbs. That difference means $10,500 less in books, computers, equipment and resources for every urban classroom in America or about $3.0 billion total--not accounting for the differences in needs. The disparity in what is provided to urban children and to children just miles from them is a national disgrace and a moral outrage. These gaps, often defined by race and class, have widened through years of neglect. No one knows how much money it would take to close those gaps but the results of not doing so are obvious. America rarely knows the full cost of its bold initiatives before it launches them.

With adequate resources, urban schools can provide the opportunities that all other children in America have: programs, services, books, computers, well-trained and paid teachers, equipment and the like. The results will be student achievement in city schools matching or surpassing any in America. Children in urban schools are as important, talented, and intelligent as children anywhere else and have the same right to a high-quality education. It is long past time that we gave it to them.

2.) The second component is fair and adequate state financing and support of urban schools. The Council is announcing that it will seek adequate and fair state aid to urban school systems, in whatever amounts are necessary to ensure that our students attain the same high standards expected of all children. In the short-run, the Council will be using new tools it has developed to assess the level of adequacy of state support. And we will be using the results to develop judicial options that we will announce within a matter of months.

The Council is also recommending that states modify their laws to permit voters in any city to establish their own threshold for approval of local bond and levies.

Finally, the Council is proposing that states provide stronger authorities to urban school superintendents and boards commensurate with their responsibilities.

3.) The third component involves federal responsibilities for urban schools. The Council is announcing that it will develop legislation, an "American Cities Education Act," that will provide: urban school block grants to develop and implement national and state academic standards; implement programs that build from models of success in urban education; address the effects of welfare and immigration reform on children; provide greater flexibility in the use of federal aid, and boost school safety.

4.) The fourth component relates to urban school infrastructure. The Council of the Great City Schools is announcing its enthusiastic support for President Clinton's new "Partnership to Rebuild America's Schools Act" providing $5.0 billion in aid to begin repairing and renovating the nation's public school buildings.

The Council will also begin preparing legislation that, upon expiration of the Clinton plan, provides funding of at least $112 billion to continue and complete the repair and renovation of urban schools across the country.

5.) **The fifth component is community.** Education is not only the responsibility of schools and governments but of everyone in the community. No school can succeed without the support of friends, neighbors, families and business. The Council believes that the fifth component of the framework should involve community mobilization. The Council is announcing that it will seek a variety of urban partners to mobilize some 2 million parents in our 50 cities that will pledge to take their children to schools, meet with their teachers, turn off the TV, read to their children for at least 30 minutes a day, and pick up their child's report cards.

City schools play a pivotal role in society. For much of our history, cities and their public schools have been the engines of progress. But these engines will run out of steam and drive the nation toward a dead end if inadequate urban school systems fail to fuel the hearts and minds of urban youth. America needs a new Marshall Plan, a Marshall Plan for America's Urban Public Schools.

Call to Action

- We call on President Clinton to make urban education central to his national education agenda.
- We call on Congress to hold extensive hearings on urban education and on the funding disparities.
- We call on states to provide fair and adequate funding for urban school children.
- We call on the Mayors for a Joint Summit to better coordinate our efforts.
- We call on corporate America to provide greater assistance to urban schools.